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MOUNTAIN GOAT

The mountain goat (*Oreamnos americanus*) is one of the animals best adapted to mountain environments. First described by Lewis and Clark as a "sheep," mountain goats are actually related to the antelope of the Old World, which include the chamois of the European Alps and several similar species from Asia.

Description

Mountain goats are white in color, with massive, "humped" shoulders. Males and females have sharp, black horns, which curve backward slightly. Their hair is long and shaggy, appearing very patchy in early summer. The animals have a conspicuous "goatee." Adult goats stand between 35 and 40 inches high and weigh between 120 and 250 lbs. Females are somewhat smaller than males. The track resembles that of a deer, however, the front ends of the hoofprint are blunt, instead of pointed and curved.

Habitat

After the Ice Age, mountain goats inhabited many of the mountainous regions of the West. Semi-fossilized remains have been found

as far east as the Grand Canyon region. With the melting of the ice and the evolution of a warmer climate, mountain goat range shrank to the mountain ranges of the Alaska and British Columbia coasts; the interior ranges of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta, British Columbia, Montana, and Idaho and the Cascade Range in Washington. Goats were introduced by man in the Olympic Mountains of Washington and in scattered mountain ranges in South Dakota, Colorado and Utah.

Their preferred habitat is rugged, rocky terrain near timberline. Mountain goats are much more dependent on the topographic features of their habitat than on vegetation and require adequate escape terrain which can harbor them from predators.

Life History

Female goats frequently form small groups usually consist of "nannies" (adult females), young-of-the-year ("kids"), yearlings and two-year olds. Adult males—"billies"—are usually solitary. During the fall, billies try to mate with as many females as possible. Kids are

born in May and June. Twinning is rare and occurs more frequently when habitat conditions are good. Nannies frequently "babysit" kids that are not their own—one observer reported an old nanny caring for five kids.

Their preferred food varies with season and availability, but their diet includes grasses, herbs, shrubs and trees.

Management

In Washington, the mountain goat is managed for both the hunting and the non-hunting public. The state's total mountain goat population is estimated at 7,500 animals, 5,500 of which occur outside of national parks and Indian reservations. Goat populations near major highways in the mountain passes are maintained to provide high-quality wildlife viewing opportunities. Hunted populations are managed for trophy hunting opportunities. For specific hunting regulations, consult the Washington Department of Wildlife brochure, *Mountain Goat, Sheep, Moose, Cougar, and Lynx Hunting Seasons*.